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AN INTRODUCTION

TO

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# An Introduction To Frobisher Bay

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## FROBISHER BAY

Frobisher Bay is a great funnel-shaped bay over 200 miles long at the southeast corner of Baffin Island, Northwest Territories. The deep water and narrowing shores have the effect of increasing the tidal range and at the head of the bay the rise and fall at average Spring tides is 44 feet, one of the greatest tidal ranges in the world. Towards the end of October the bay freezes and it does not break up sufficiently to allow ships to enter until mid-July.

The bay was named after Sir Martin Frobisher, who entered it in 1576 in search of a northwest passage with two tiny ships of 20-30 tons, the "Gabriel" and "Michael". He sailed about two thirds of the way up the bay but was distracted from his quest by the discovery of what he thought to be gold. He visited Frobisher Bay again two years later and established a mine near the entrance to the bay. It proved to be worthless.

The next man to visit Frobisher Bay was C.F. Hall, in the middle of the nineteenth century. He showed that it was a bay and not a strait leading to the western Arctic as had been believed till that time. Here, he was surprised to meet an Eskimo woman who spoke excellent English. It transpired that she and her husband had been to England on board a whaling vessel, where she had learned to speak the English language.

With the extension of fur trading to the eastern Arctic, the Hudson's Bay Company established a trading post near the entrance of Frobisher Bay in 1914. In 1942 the U.S. Air Force built an airfield and hospital on Koojesse Inlet at the head of the Bay. This is the location of the present Frobisher Bay settlement, 63°45' North, 68°34' West, in the District of Franklin.

The airfield was one of several built during World War II as part of the Crimson Air Staging Route. At the end of the war Canada reimbursed the U.S. government for the cost of these airfields and the







R.C.A.F. was given control of the Frobisher airport in 1950. The Hudson's Bay Company moved its post to Apex Hill, a site 2 1/2 miles east of the air station.

Since then a settlement has grown at Apex Hill, and compared to small Arctic communities like Arctic Bay or Pond Inlet, Frobisher Bay is a metropolis. The present town, the air base and the Eskimo village make up the largest community in the entire Arctic. Its permanent population of over 1,000 (including some 650 Eskimos) is almost doubled by seasonal workers during the shipping and construction months.

In addition to the Hudson's Bay trading post there are two schools, a mission, a hospital, a nursing station, two banks, neat rows of modern bungalows and the Northern Affairs Department's Rehabilitation Centre for handicapped Eskimos.

In 1957 the Department of Transport took over the operation of the air station as a civilian airport. It is now a refuelling base for several intercontinental airlines flying jets on the "polar route" - the shortest distance between the west coast of the North American continent and western Europe - and will also be used by the U.S. Air Force and by Canadian aircraft serving the north.

A few years ago the government decided that Frobisher Bay should be the administrative centre for the eastern Arctic, with facilities for education, rehabilitation and medical care. A permanent site for a new town was chosen near the air base and a team of consultants appointed to plan the development of a modern townsite.

In co-operation with the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources and the Department of Public Works, the consulting architects and engineers will study the problems involved, and on the basis of these studies the final form of the town and its buildings will be established. The planners are keeping a tentative population figure of 1,500 in mind and everything needed for a normal town of that size,



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including schools, housing, recreational facilities, hospital, stores, administrative offices, churches and hotels will be provided.

An important factor in the development of Frobisher Bay is the matter of providing adequate facilities for the shipping, handling and storage of necessary supplies. When the tide is out, there is a long mud beach which adds considerably to the shipping difficulties.

To ensure the best possible conditions for community life in the northern town, it is expected that a town planner will be added later to the present team of consultants. Also, as the studies progress, it may be necessary to obtain the services of specialists in related fields.

The Northern Canada Power Commission will be responsible for the design and operation of the plant and facilities necessary for the production of electric power and steam. Although this problem has not yet been considered in detail, atomic energy has been suggested as a possible source of power for the community. Oil is the most common fuel in use at present in the modern communities in Canada's north.

#### FROBISHER BAY GROWS WITH THE NORTH

It took Martin Frobisher 65 days to reach his bay from London. Now it takes no more than 36 hours from anywhere in the world.

That's not the only change. The land is about the same as 400 years ago, but among the rocks where Frobisher sought only gold is a new and bigger kind of investment - an investment in human resources. Here is a settlement of people, not unique in size or appearance, but unique because it is designed to help a people beginning a new way of life.

This is a meeting place of two cultures, but not a place of casual first meetings as in Frobisher's time. Here men of the south and the north live together and benefit by the experience. Frobisher Bay is passing from an experiment to a pattern, designed to bring the Eskimos the opportunities and responsibilities of their Canadian citizenship.







Before 1955, there was not a single building where the Apex Hill town stands. Now signs of modern progress are everywhere. Aeroplanes and helicopters drone overhead, trucks travel the streets and the winding road that leads to the base. The people have electric lights, and refrigerators. In spite of this comparative urbanization, the edges of the town lie against the same empty tundra that stretches from Churchill to Cape Columbia, and the traditions of Eskimo life are still close by.

In the town the Eskimo mothers walk the streets in their colourful fish-tail parkas, carrying their children on their backs just as their ancestors did thousands of years ago. Hunters return to the town with their kills of caribou or seal; sled dogs sleep beside trucks; sealskins are drying on lines stretched between hydro poles. In summer, the sighting of seals in the bay still brings excited men, women, and children running to the shores to launch the boats. And a few miles from the town near the base, a band of Eskimos live in a tent village almost as primitive as any in the Arctic today.

### THE ESKIMOS

Civilization has left its mark on every Eskimo in Frobisher Bay; their life is a mixture of old and new. Of course, the townspeople have been most affected by the new ways. They live in houses lit by electricity and warmed by oil from two thousand miles away. People in the tent village use kerosene lamps and gasoline stoves, sewing machines and dozens of other items, essentials to us, but new landmarks in the living standards of the Eskimos. From the trading post or the mail order catalogue they buy everything from print dresses to outboard motors.

Many of the men work full or part time at the airbase or the town as carpenters, stevedores, cooks' helpers, and general handymen. Almost any time, Eskimos can be seen driving trucks and tractors, building and painting houses, or doing any of the construction and







maintenance jobs that are common in every southern community. But while mastering new jobs, these workmen have not forgotten the old skills of their forefathers. The same Eskimo who drives a bulldozer today may be hunting walrus tomorrow.

For the most part, the women have been less exposed to southern methods than the men. English is spoken by some men but by few women. But the women who are living in the new houses are learning quickly to manage their strange household gadgets, and in their way are bringing in the new world.

### THE REHABILITATION CENTRE

The Eskimo Rehabilitation Centre trains Eskimos who return from southern Canadian hospitals to become self-supporting once more. At the present time, a comparatively high percentage of the total Eskimo population is receiving treatment for tuberculosis. Many of these people will never again be fit for the hard life of hunting and trapping, and they must be taught new skills to equip them for jobs that will not endanger their health. Some of the former patients will have recovered more fully than others, and will be able to return to the old life. But even for these, a period of rehabilitation will be necessary to enable them to regain their former hardiness and hunting skill.

A transportation centre linked by air routes with the outside world and with many Arctic communities, Frobisher Bay was a logical choice for the location of the first Eskimo Rehabilitation Centre. Owing to the presence of a busy air base and the building of a new town, the training facilities at Frobisher Bay are unequalled anywhere in the Eastern Arctic. Here in an expanding community, Eskimos can gain practical experience in construction, carpentry, woodworking, mechanics, and other trades. Similarly, Frobisher Bay offers permanent employment opportunities for a relatively large number of Eskimos once they are







trained. In addition to being trained for employment, the people are shown how to live in a modern world. Eskimo women are being instructed in the elements of housekeeping and sanitation, nutrition, child care, management of income, and in the techniques of cooking with modern equipment.

Eskimos are now operating a laundry, a butcher shop, a bakery, a tannery, a sewing workshop, two handicrafts outlets, a movie theatre and a small hotel. Others are engaged in cottage industry, carving soapstone figurines or making parkas and other articles of clothing at home. For those who are able to participate, organized hunts using new methods are conducted to provide fresh meat for the butcher shop and skins for the handicrafts stores.

The movie house is grossing more than \$1,000 a week, while the sale of handicrafts at the two outlets produces about the same income. Since most of the centre's projects are concerned with the sale of goods or services, the entire program is close to self-supporting. The Eskimos trained in the various enterprises will be encouraged to eventually buy them, with assistance from the government's Eskimo Loan Fund.

Cottage industries have also been established in other settlements, including Fort Chimo, Ivuyivik, Cape Dorset, Sugluk, Povungnituk, Cape Dyer and Grise Fiord. Products from these settlements are all shipped to Frobisher Bay, where the demand for handicrafts at the busy air base absorbs the entire production.

The Centre started operations in 1957 and consists of 18 houses, 10 experimental homes, 10 styrofoam igloos, a kitchen and dining hall, a bath house and laundry, and facilities for the various projects.

A second rehabilitation centre is planned for Inuvik in the western Arctic next year.







## THE SCHOOLS

In a land that is moving from the stone age to the machine age in a single generation, one of the greatest needs of the Eskimo people is education. In preparing the Arctic's junior citizens for the new life that is certain to face most of them when they reach maturity, teachers who have moved into the North are playing a role vital to the country's future.

Bringing education to the North presents difficult problems. Canada's 11,000 Eskimos live in small and isolated groups scattered across a million square miles of territory. Much of the population is semi-nomadic, shifting with the seasons and with the availability of game. Under these conditions, it is impossible to build schools or to provide teachers to serve every isolated group. The only solution is to establish schools in key centres where the local populations are large enough to warrant them, and to build hostels in the most strategically located of these communities for the accommodation of children from outlying areas. There is the further problem of timing the school year to coincide with the movements of the people. While many Eskimos live in permanent settlements throughout the year, others live in remote hunting camps in some seasons and migrate to the settlements in others. This means that many schools in the Arctic must operate the year round. The schools at Frobisher Bay are no exception, and classes are held there during both winter and summer.

Like every other federal day school in the Arctic, the Frobisher Bay schools are under the direction of the Education Division of Northern Affairs. The first school was built in 1955 at Apex Hill and has two classrooms, a combined library and projection room, a nurse's room and office, a kitchen, and playrooms. The school library also provides space for a community library. The latter is growing steadily and should soon reach its target of 2,000 volumes. Designed to accommodate 40 pupils, the school opened in November of 1955 with





an enrolment of 33 children. Attendance fluctuates with the seasons, and the number of day pupils enrolled at any one time since the opening has varied between 32 and 54. An additional 4-room school was built at the airport in 1958 to handle the growing enrolment.

Although English-speaking people have lived continuously at Frobisher Bay for 15 years, comparatively few of the Eskimos here were able to speak English before the school opened. But some knowledge of English is essential if they are to take full advantage of the increasing opportunities for wage employment in the community. For this reason, English is a very important subject on the curriculum. Now, the children are learning the language in day classes while special night classes are held for adults.

By Arctic standards, Frobisher Bay is already an important educational centre. However, its importance will probably increase many times within the next few years. Plans are being made to provide facilities for vocational training, and to build a hostel to house a substantial number of Eskimo children from outside Frobisher Bay.

#### MEDICAL FACILITIES

The widely scattered population has made impractical the establishment of many full-scale hospitals in the Arctic, but the Department of National Health and Welfare has set up nursing stations at strategic locations throughout the North. With trained nurses permanently in the field, close watch is kept on the health of the Eskimo population. The stations are equipped to handle everything but the most serious ailments, and patients who cannot be treated on the spot are evacuated to southern hospitals.

Baffin Island has 2 hospitals and 3 nursing stations. Frobisher Bay has an 8-bed hospital and a resident doctor assisted by a staff of nurses and a hospital administrator. The other hospital is at





Pangnirtung. It is operated by the Anglican mission with a resident doctor from the Department of National Health and Welfare in attendance. The nursing stations are at Cape Dorset, Lake Harbour and Frobisher Bay.

The hospital and nursing station at Frobisher must, like others, serve a huge hinterland.

### CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE

Building an Arctic town presents complications that are unknown to southern contractors. Transportation of material is slow and costly, and the summers are short. At Frobisher Bay, the permafrost lies just a foot below the surface of the ground. Wherever possible, foundations must be kept above the permafrost level, otherwise heat from the buildings will cause the frost to melt. If this happens, the results are sagging foundations and tilted buildings. Furthermore, the permafrost does not allow surface water to seep away, and poor drainage is a constant problem. Buildings must be strongly braced to withstand high winds. But roofs do not need added strength to withstand the weight of snow because, oddly enough, the average yearly snowfall in the Arctic is a good deal less than in Ottawa or Montreal.

At present, the Engineering Division of Northern Affairs is responsible for the construction and maintenance of all departmental establishments and facilities in the Canadian arctic. Included in the Division's staff are architects, draftsmen, and civil, electrical, and mechanical engineers. The field staff at Frobisher Bay consists of a resident engineer and two technical officers. The engineer is in charge of all Engineering activities in the town. One looks after the construction and maintenance of buildings, while the other is responsible for the upkeep and operation of mechanical and electrical equipment. At the same time, the technical officers train Eskimo helpers in the fine points of carpentry or mechanics.

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The Department provides full or part-time employment for a number of Eskimos at Frobisher Bay. These include carpenters, truck drivers, and tractor operators.

Of course, summer is a busy time of year. A soil survey and test boring of future building sites has been undertaken. The approaches to the beach must be cleared for the landing barges to unload their cargos at ship time, and the Department of Transport has almost completed the construction of a jetty on the peninsula side of the Inlet.

The arrival and unloading of the ships is the big event of the summer. Beginning in late July, unloading, checking, sorting, and storing cargo continues around the clock for two or three weeks. Virtually every able-bodied man in the community takes part, for time is short and every piece of cargo is vital. Without the fuel, food, clothing, building materials, mechanical equipment, and spare parts that the ships bring, the town could not exist, much less continue to develop as the centre of the Eastern Arctic.


In addition to all these urgent seasonal jobs, the regular year-round maintenance of community services and service equipment must continue: hauling fresh water, disposing of sewage and garbage, keeping the power house in operation, maintaining roads, repairing trucks and machinery.

#### THE AIR BASE

The area known as the air base accommodates much more than a landing field and a military installation. Establishments there include the Department of Transport, the Royal Canadian Navy, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the United States Air Force and the Federal Electric Corporation. Four major airlines flying the transpolar route now use Frobisher airport as a refueling base and have permanent staff at Frobisher Bay. The airport is operated entirely by the Department of Transport, which is at present extending the runway to a length of 9,000 feet and a width of 200 feet.



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## THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY

In 1914, the Hudson's Bay Company established a trading post on the shore of Frobisher Bay about 30 miles from the site of the present town. After the airfield was built in 1942, the post was moved to its present location. Later, it was replaced by a new and larger building which combines the features of a fur trading post with those of a general store. It stocks the general store's usual lines of goods, including food, clothing, and hardware. Among its more unusual types of merchandise are Eskimo carvings and handicrafts.

## THE MISSION

Anglican missionaries have been active in the Frobisher Bay area for many years, and virtually all the Eskimos in the district were registered Anglicans in the last census. The town now has a resident Anglican missionary.

## BANKING

Two Canadian banks have branches at Frobisher Bay; the Royal Bank of Canada and the Bank of Montreal. Both branch offices are located at the airport.

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